

C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 000446

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/WE LEVIN; NEA/RA; NEA/NGA; DRL/IRF ABRAMSON, DEATHERAGE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2/24/2015

TAGS: IZ KIRF PHUM PREL SOCI VT

SUBJECT: CHALDEAN PATRIARCH: INCREASED SECURITY, RELIABLE ELECTRICITY
NEEDED IN IRAQ

REF: A) 03 VATICAN 5521; B) VATICAN 380

CLASSIFIED BY: Peter Martin, POL, Vatican, State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Iraqi Chaldean Catholic Patriarch Emmanuel III Delly told Charge February 17 that the coalition's failure to date to provide reasonable security and reliable electricity were the biggest obstacles to acceptance of U.S. efforts by the Iraqi people. The lack of security led many to conclude they were safer under the old regime, while the lack of progress in improving basic services confirmed for many suspicions that U.S. motives were not about improving the life of Iraqis but controlling Iraq's oil. Despite widespread popular frustration over what the Patriarch inadvertently termed "the U.S. occupation," he insisted that U.S. troops must remain in Iraq to prevent internecine chaos that he believes would certainly result from a premature U.S. pullout. He urged greater attention to protect Iraq's borders and prevent foreign mercenaries and jihadists from creating further unrest. Delly conveyed his appreciation for Embassy Baghdad's attention to Christian concerns, and urged continued efforts to ensure the new constitution protects the rights of religious minorities.
End Summary.

Security, Electricity Key Obstacles to Success

¶2. (C) While welcoming the possibilities for democratic change opened up by January's elections, Iraqi Chaldean Catholic Patriarch Emmanuel III Delly told the Charge at a February 17 lunch that the coalition's failure to improve security and provide basic services -- particularly electricity -- would continue to thwart U.S. efforts to gain the trust and support of the Iraqi people. In Rome for consultations at the Vatican, including a meeting with the Pope, the Patriarch lamented the deterioration in the security situation. Few Iraqis, he said, felt they could walk out their doors and feel safe. This persistent sense of fear and insecurity led many Iraqis to conclude that life in Iraq was worse now than it had been under Saddam. The Patriarch added that he personally did not feel he could safely leave his house, and told us he had received several death threats.

¶3. (C) While Delly acknowledged coalition efforts to improve security, he urged -- as he has in the past -- greater attention to Iraq's porous borders, claiming that foreigners are still entering Iraq with little difficulty. He believed that these young jihadists, often paid and abetted by deep-pocketed Iraqi Baathists, were a primary source of the daily terror that rocked Baghdad and other cities. He noted that many of the foreigners were enticed to Iraq with promises of money and glory, and then were left in desperate situations that made suicide bombings seem the only way out. Delly also maintained that persistent high unemployment among young Iraqi men took away their sense of dignity and hope, and led many of them to undertake suicide or other dangerous actions against coalition forces.

¶4. (C) Beyond security, the Patriarch repeatedly emphasized how much continuing problems in providing electricity and other basic services were damaging the U.S. cause. He maintained that most Baghdad residents, himself included, received only three hours of electricity a day. In the face of popular perceptions of the U.S. as the omnipotent superpower, Delly explained, Iraqis have a hard time understanding how nearly two years after the invasion, no progress has been made. This incomprehension leads them to question both U.S. competency and motives. "Few believe that if the U.S. really wanted to, it couldn't provide more than three hours of electricity a day," the Patriarch observed, adding "this is when they start thinking that you came for the oil." While making clear he did not share this view, he emphasized that there are few things the U.S. could do that would have more impact on Iraqi perceptions. With even twelve hours of electricity a day, the Patriarch exclaimed, "people would be out in the streets chanting 'USA.'"

U.S. Troops Must Stay

15. (C) Although he first inadvertently referred to the presence of coalition troops as an "occupation" before quickly correcting himself, the Patriarch insisted that coalition troops remained indispensable to stability in Iraq. He rejected the notion that

withdrawal of U.S. forces would lessen tensions, arguing instead that this would lead to social and political chaos and increased internecine fighting. "Iraq is simply not ready to stand on its own," he concluded. At the same time, the Patriarch believed that U.S. forces could do more to boost their standing with Iraqis and ensure their security. Citing a number of cases where U.S. soldiers had refused to respond to requests for help -- in one case simply watching a bank being robbed (which the Patriarch personally witnessed) or refusing to respond to requests for help with wounded family members -- the Patriarch said these situations conveyed an impression to the Iraqi people of a lack of U.S. respect for the dignity of the Iraqi people. The Patriarch fully appreciated that soldiers had specific orders and could not take on the role of policemen or provide first aid, but he believed that greater flexibility and sensitivity would go a long way to improving the U.S. image. Delly also claimed that U.S. forces made themselves more vulnerable to insurgents' attacks by always following the same routes on patrol at the same times. "The British and Italians always mix up their routes," he stated, "but the Americans always pass by at the same time."

Elections: A Mixed Assessment

16. (C) In assessing the Iraqi political scene following January's elections, the Patriarch evinced an odd mix of skepticism and enthusiasm. At first pessimistic, Delly suggested that the January elections had been far from a success given that so many Sunnis had not turned out to vote. However, as the Charge engaged him on the importance of the signal conveyed by millions of Iraqis turning out to vote despite direct threats against them, the Patriarch began to warm to the subject, noting with pride the large number of women elected as representatives. He went on to describe the historic opportunity the Iraqis had to develop a constitution that would safeguard religious liberty and other human rights. Delly said he did not believe most Shi'a representatives wanted to create a constitution based on the Koran, but he added that he would feel much safer if the constitution made specific mention of Christianity when laying out the rights of minorities. He shared the U.S. view that, if the international community can help Iraq follow through on these elections, the Iraqi example could have a positive influence on the entire Middle East.

Vatican Supports International Efforts

17. (C) The Vatican signaled its continuing keen interest in Iraq by granting Patriarch Delly an audience with the Pope February 19 -- the first formal audience the Pope has held since his recent hospitalization. Delly told us he was not sure if the Pope would be able to meet with him during his stay, but John Paul II clearly wanted to demonstrate his personal attention to Iraq through the meeting. In a meeting with Holy See Foreign Minister-equivalent Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo just prior to our lunch, the Patriarch said the Vatican affirmed its concern for the status of Christians in Iraq, and its desire for a continued international presence to promote the development of a democratic Iraq that respected religious freedom for all its citizens.

Comment

18. (C) The Patriarch conveyed his appreciation for the close relationship he has had with Ambassador Negroponte and other members of Embassy Baghdad, and for the Embassy's attention to the concerns of Iraq's Christian community. He welcomed continued close consultation, though he added that he has to be careful in contacts with the Embassy so as not to make himself even more of a target. He pointed out that if some in Iraq knew he was dining at the U.S. Ambassador's residence, they would be outraged, and he asked that we keep the contact private. The Patriarch remains a valuable ally for the U.S., who will continue to build bridges with the other religious leaders and communities and advocate religious tolerance. He reiterated his previously stated (ref a) thanks for the U.S. removal of Saddam, which he believes has given Iraq new hope. But he also continues to believe that the U.S. could do itself and Iraq much good by stepping up efforts to achieve security and provide basic services. He, and the Holy See, remain deeply troubled by the continuing flight of Christians from Iraq.

19. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

HARDT

NNNN

2005VATICA00446 - Classification: CONFIDENTIAL